

DR. BALCH'S CAREER.

Conspicuous in the Early Days of Georgetown.

THE CHURCH HE BUILT.

A Distinguished Divine Who Was the Friend of Washington—Connected With the Early History of the District—The Old Academy and the Columbian Library.



HE SUBJECT OF this sketch, though having passed away thirty years before the birth of the writer, deserves more mention than a brief epitaph on his tomb in Oak Hill cemetery.

Rev. Stephen Bloomer Balch, D. D., was born April 5, 1747, on Deer creek, Hartford county, Md., which empties into the Susquehanna river about thirty-five miles from Baltimore. His grandfather came direct from Wales. His father removed to Maryland about 1740 and occupied a small farm on the banks of the creek, where, by tilling the soil, he provided for his family. The tide of emigration drew him south to the then Eden, Maryland. North of the Potomac, he followed in his wake in 1769 and settled in Mecklenburg county, near Charlotte. The family consisted of eight children—six boys and two girls. Three of the brothers followed the plow and three took up the cross and preached the Christ and Him crucified. The Rev. Hezekiah James Balch was one of the first signers of the celebrated Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence May 20, 1775.

After Stephen removed to North Carolina he experienced great difficulties in obtaining an education. By the vigor of his own mind he acquired a knowledge of Latin and Greek. He labored in summer and taught in winter, and in that way supplied himself with money which was needed for travel and matriculation. In 1772 he left the humble home of his parents and entered Princeton College, New Jersey, then under the superintendence of the distinguished John Witherspoon, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Among his classmates were William Bradford, attorney general of Pennsylvania, and Aaron Burr. He graduated in 1774 in a class of twenty. He was appointed a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. He left college for



REV. DR. STEPHEN B. BALCH. (From an old engraving.)

Lower Marlboro, Calvert county, Md., to assume charge of a classical academy. When on his journey reaching Philadelphia he found himself short of funds and alone in the city. He determined, however, to call for what he needed at the hotel, and as a last resort to show his testimonials as an evidence that he was worthy to be trusted. The next morning he was walking the crowded street, and as he passed a person who seemed to look at him scrutinizingly, and before he had reached the hotel came up to him, stating that he was a merchant from North Carolina, and Dr. Balch informed him he was a relative there. "Well, they have shown me great kindness lately," said the merchant, "and perhaps I can pay back some of it by aiding you. He led Dr. Balch to the residence of his relatives there. "Well, they have shown me great kindness lately," said the merchant, "and perhaps I can pay back some of it by aiding you. He led Dr. Balch to the residence of his relatives there.

A MILITIA CAPTAIN.

After assuming charge of the academy on October 1, 1775, he was appointed captain of his pupils of age to be enrolled in the state militia. He trained the youth of his company to a knowledge of the military exercises, that they might be ready at any moment to exchange their books for muskets, and they followed him as their captain, always boasting danger where it existed. The field officers under whom he acted were Maj. Patrick Smith and Col. Alexander Somerville of the Maryland militia. His company consisted of between forty and fifty youths, many of whom he regarded as his own children. He served in actual service against the enemy from December 1, 1775, to December 1, 1777. When the enemy appeared at the shores of the Potomac river and Chesapeake bay he would march out with his company to assist in repelling the invader. He was exposed to the night air in that unhealthy climate. Among his pupils were Dr. Chas. A. Beatty and Dr. Worthington, who were later to become prominent in the languages, and attended his family gratuitously for many years, always declining compensation when offered, his chief dignity was the same time and borrowed from the Rev. Thos. Claggett, who was a planter of tobacco aged afterward a bishop. Dr. Balch was accustomed to receive from the dioceses of Maryland. They were a gay community. The trustees paid him in continental money, which in a few days was worth as much to him as the sum of the exchange, and he left Calvert county as poor as he entered it and went into Pennsylvania to be licensed by the Donegal presbytery.

HOMESTEAD FOUNDED.

Six years had elapsed since he left the old homestead, and southward he wended his way. Arriving on Tuesday in Georgetown, D. C., in 1778, he was invited to preach. The only place of worship at that time was the Episcopal St. Peter's Church, a log building located on the corner of 24th and Q streets northwest, in charge of Rev. Charles Beatty, Episcopal minister, and Col. Charles Beatty, presbyter, pastor to permit Dr. Balch to preach Thursday, which he did. Being urged to remain over Sunday, Dr. Balch preached the following morning and evening. The death of his father having taken place it was natural that he wished to see his kindred and long an absence, and on his way back he found his father had bequeathed the whole of his small fortune to his two daughters, except one silver dollar to each of his six sons. He divided his dollar between his two sisters, and after lingering awhile in his old home he went abroad to preach among the Indians of North Carolina and Georgia. In his missionary tour he experienced rudeness and many privations more than once among the tribes in the gloomiest period of the revolution. He always endeavored to soothe the angry passions that kindled up the flames of discord, and he was once in the danger of being killed by the Indians. He was once in the danger of being killed by the Indians. He was once in the danger of being killed by the Indians.

REPARATION FOR GEORGETOWN.

Receiving many letters urging him to return to the town, an unenviable field for his labors, a mere hamlet then whose chief wealth was tobacco and warehouses—monuments to the industry of the inhabitants in their ornaments. After due consideration he accepted the call, and resting here from his itinerant March 16, 1780, he arrived in our midst and a grand triumphal procession met him at the wharf, which he had just left for the purpose. He preached his first sermon in a small frame building which was used as a school house in the week and as a church on the Sabbath. It stood on the north side of M street near 33d, where Cook & Jarbo's

carriage factory now stands. Soon after commencing his ministerial labors he succeeded John Rogers, who taught a classical academy here, and was succeeded by Rev. Wm. Arm, author of the "British Spy" and Attorney General of the United States, and Richard Brent, a man distinguished in the annals of the Representatives. Dr. Balch was not only the pioneer in religion, but of education, the income from the academy supporting him while he labored to form a congregation and erect a church, and after his first sermon six followers of Calvin knelt about him in silent prayer and partook of the Lord's supper. Such was the beginning of the Presbyterian Church in the District.

HIS MARRIAGE.

July 10, 1781, he was united in marriage by Rev. Isaac Stockton Keith to Elizabeth Beall, the eldest daughter of George Beall. The couple used at the wedding were not much larger than a thimble. The ladies of Georgetown being patriotic and positively refused to drink tea during the progress of the revolution. His wife was young, beautiful and industrious; uncomplaining and unobtrusive in adverse circumstances. She reared nine children. In 1782 he succeeded in raising sufficient funds to erect a church about thirty feet square on the corner of 30th and M streets northwest, and in 1783 he erected a mansion which he called Manse on a round green hill near the river, on the east side of Duck lane, now 33d street, south of Scotch row, where the canal crosses the street. It was surrounded by a few cottages. A short distance from the house a running brook made its way to the river, which has long since been hushed.

In 1784 the Rev. Dr. Addison receiving information that there were some Episcopal families in the town, he paid it a visit and was invited by Dr. Balch to hold an Episcopal service in his church and encouraged him to organize an Episcopal congregation and in 1786 Dr. Balch assisted Dr. Addison in soliciting subscriptions, and they succeeded in raising \$1,500, which formed a nucleus for the erection of St. John's Church, corner of Potomac avenue and O street northwest. The name of Dr. Balch appears as a subscriber, and he also assisted in the dedication of the new church.

A few weeks after the death of his friend Gen. George Washington, December 14, 1799, Dr. Balch gave notice that on a certain Sabbath he would speak of his life and services. The people gathered from all the surrounding country and he preached to more than 1,000 in the open air. The next was the last verse of the tenth chapter of the Book of Esther. "For Mordecai, the Jew, was next unto King Ahasuerus and great among the Jews and accepted by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people and speaking peace to all his seed."

A TRYING PERIOD.

In 1800, desiring to devote all his time to his pastoral duties, he corresponded with Rev. David Wiley, urging him to become his successor in the academy, which was accepted. From that year to 1807 was the most trying period in the old pastor's life. He had relinquished his business of instruction, and applied himself to his duties as pastor, a step he did not take without reflection, for he derived from his congregation but a meager support. Large sums of money passed through his hands during his incumbency of the classical academy, but he loved money only for the good it may be made to accomplish. He was a man of Irish generosity, and none ever appealed to him for help or relief that he did not respond, expecting no reward save that which comes to a noble soul for having helped the helpless. He was contenting with a multitude of cares at a cost greater than he could well afford. He had inherited the paper of the late Rev. Dr. Walter, in the Columbian Bank to the extent of \$2,000, which he had to pay, and his two eldest sons were at Princeton College. But his income lay in the church, which was his home, his life, and ever in his sight. His property consisted of an island in the Potomac river called Patmos, from which he derived a small income, and of Wilberforce, a lot of ten acres, which he had named after the British statesman who had great agency in abolishing the slave trade on the coast of Africa. He wrote to Wilberforce about the honor conferred on him, and the statesman replied most politely in a letter from his cottage on the Lake of Ulster. Wilberforce was highly cultivated. The frontage was superb, but he never deserts in time of need, when kind friends came to his relief, and his wife and children were his constant companions. He was divided into halves and bricks and mortar fell into the street. 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